

RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
ATTORNEY GENERAL



55 Elm Street
P.O. Box 120
Hartford, CT 06141-0120

Office of The Attorney General
State of Connecticut

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*TESTIMONY OF
ATTORNEY GENERAL RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
BEFORE THE INSURANCE AND REAL ESTATE COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 17, 2009*

I appreciate the opportunity to strongly oppose -- Senate Bill 896, An Act Concerning the Repair of Damaged Motor Vehicles.

This legislation threatens to further confuse auto repair consumers through surplus and redundant notices of their right to choose an auto repairer and imposes significant additional costs on repairers without any benefit to the consumer.

Current law requires that insurers employ a certified appraiser to value the needed repairs to a damaged vehicle. The appraiser should provide an independent, objective assessment. In reality, the insurer dictates the repairs, demands unreasonable concessions on the costs of repairs and drives consumers to preferred repair facilities. Appraisers are often insurer employees and actually work out of insurer appraisal facilities. I have strongly supported efforts to make these appraisers more independent -- separate and distinct from insurers.

Perversely, Senate Bill 896 requires a motor vehicle repairer to hire an appraiser, increasing costs to the repairer and ultimately the consumer, even when the repair is not paid by the insurer. The requirement also means that two different appraisers will be working on the same motor vehicle repair assessment when the motor vehicle is insured.

I urge the committee take no further action on Senate Bill 896. Rather, the committee should consider legislation that will promote the consumer interests in obtaining quality repair at a fair price based on a truly independent assessment of the repairs and the costs of making them.

I look forward to working with the committee on this issue. Thank you.